Literature in School as a Space for Conceptualizing and Negotiating the Cultural Identity–Globalization Relationship (The Case of Ismail Kadare's Chronicle in Stone)

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Received: 2 October 2025 / Accepted: 15 November 2025 / Published: 26 November 2025

Doi: 10.56345/ijrdv12n314

Abstract

This study examines the role of literature in schools as a space for conceptualizing and critically discussing the relationship between cultural identity and globalization. Focusing on Ismail Kadare's novel Chronicle in Stone and drawing on theoretical perspectives from literary anthropology and cultural studies, the research aims to demonstrate how literary texts foster reflective understanding of identity in global contexts. Methodologically, the study adopts an anthropological-literary framework combined with a poetics of experience approach, which allows for close reading of textual details while maintaining a dialogic relationship with broader cultural processes. The analysis reveals how Kadare's narrative reflects the complex interplay between local memory, cultural specificity, and global dynamics. Findings suggest that literature not only develops aesthetic sensibilities but also cultivates critical awareness, enabling students to perceive globalization as a dialogic and transformative process rather than a threat to cultural identity. The article concludes that literary education can nurture an open, reflective, and democratic cultural consciousness, reinforcing the value of literature as both an artistic and anthropological tool in contemporary pedagogy.

Keywords: *Identity; Globalization; Literature; Idiographic analysis; Cultural memory*

1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to demonstrate that literature can serve as a reflective space where students engage with collective and cultural memory, understand the dynamic nature of identity, and critically examine the interplay between local specificity and global processes. By focusing on Kadare's narrative, this study highlights literature's potential to cultivate aesthetic sensitivity, critical thinking, and cultural consciousness in educational settings.

In contemporary education, literature serves as a crucial tool for preparing students to navigate complex social and cultural realities. Modern curricula aim to expand students' learning and communication beyond narrowly defined subject boundaries while maintaining disciplinary rigor (Burali, 2009; Gambino, n.d.). Literature, in particular, is valued for its dual role as both an aesthetic object and a medium through which cultural, historical, and social meanings are interpreted (Twal, 2011; Ukaj, 2016).

Ismail Kadare, a prominent Albanian novelist, poet, and essayist, widely translated and internationally recognized, is known for his engagement with Albanian cultural identity. Critics often describe his oeuvre as establishing an organic connection between literature and the cultural, historical, and ethnic dimensions of Albania (Ukaj, 2016). Many of his works, either in complete form or in anthological selections, are part of the Albanian school curriculum, providing students with sustained engagement with narratives of national and cultural significance.

Among his works, *Chronicle in Stone* (*Kronikë në gur*) is particularly noteworthy for its autobiographical richness

and its detailed depiction of Albanian identity. The novel offers numerous idiographic details—linguistic, semiotic, and ethnographic—that reflect both local memory and the broader cultural context (Kadare, 1978; Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995).

Although Kadare's oeuvre has been widely examined by Albanian and international scholars, relatively little attention has been given to its pedagogical potential. Within the framework of an increasingly open and interdisciplinary curriculum, studying Kadare's work not only as a literary artifact but also as an anthropological and educational resource proves particularly meaningful. Such an approach enables students to develop a nuanced understanding of identity and culture while simultaneously fostering analytical and critical thinking skills.

2. Methods

This study is grounded in a perspective that challenges the culturalist paradigm of the "ideological representation of society," which over the years has moved beyond physical and social environments to occupy criteria for defining the human being—criteria that abstract from invariant cross-cultural psychological characteristics. The study relies on literary details that resist being a mere reflection of "universal human nature" or the "unitary system of nature." However, this is not intended as a confrontation between universality and particularity, nor between absolutism and relativism. Rather, it aims to identify particularities within a society that exists under the pressures of globalization, which is conceptualized here in its broader dimension as "a historical process which transforms the spatial organization of social relations and transactions, generating trans-continental or inter-regional networks of interaction and the exercise of power. It is a combination of internationalization, political and economic liberalization, and technological revolution" (Steger, 2017, p. 13), or, more concisely, as "a short form for a cluster of related changes: economic, ideological, technological, and cultural" (Steger, 2017, p. 13).

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in the poetics of experience, emphasizing idiographic analysis, subjective perception, autonomy, and complexity in literary texts (Burali, 2009; Gambino, n.d.; Delitz & Mancuso, 2006).

Kadare is described by critics as a "*captivating ironic narrator who gathers … details in a … brilliant way, full of symbolic reality*" (Kadare, 2014, [Back cover]) while, from a stylistic perspective, his writing is distinguished by qualities such as *psychological and intellectual detachment, somnambulism*, and, on the other hand, "*precision and accuracy*." Since these characterizations form part of the narrative style of the novel *Chronicle in Stone*, we have selected those passages from the novel that are typical of Kadare's style and that carry interpretive potential within a tension of opposites: between "the lyrical, dreamlike, unreal dimension and the real one," (Kadare, 1996, p. 95) while also expressing a deep connection with his life in his native city.

We believe this provides an excellent opportunity for students to develop key competencies—thinking, communication, expressive, civic, and personal—through literary competencies: "by identifying and appreciating selected aspects of Kadare's literature, employing established forms of writing, engaging in literary discussions and analyses, or interpreting through various interdisciplinary projects," (Agjencia e Sigurimit të Cilësisë së Arsimit Profesional, 2025) for example: *"Discussion topic: The Albanian World in Kadare's Work".* (Botime Pegi, 2024)

The research is guided by the question: *How can the idiographic details in Kadare's Chronicle in Stone facilitate critical reflection on cultural identity in the context of globalizing forces?*

To address this question, the study begins with the careful selection of literary fragments from *Chronicle in Stone* (*Kronikë në gur*) that contain rich idiographic details, such as descriptions of the city, material culture, daily practices, and interpersonal relations. These selections are guided by their potential to reveal subjective experiences, cultural memory, and the complexity of social and historical contexts (Kadare, 1978; Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995).

The close reading of these fragments focuses on the narrator's perspective, emotional engagement, and lived experience. This analysis respects the relative autonomy of the literary subject, allowing the text to express multiple layers of meaning without reducing experience to universal categories. Through attention to concrete and unique details, the study applies an idiographic lens, capturing the richness and specificity of cultural and historical reality (Burali, 2009; Gambino, n.d.; Delitz & Mancuso, 2006).

Finally, the findings are synthesized in a dialogic reflection that connects the idiographic and subjective insights to broader discussions of cultural identity and globalization. Literature is thus approached as a reflective and pedagogical space that encourages critical thinking about identity, memory, and global interconnections, enabling students to engage with culture as a dynamic and multi-layered phenomenon (Alam, 2017; Kacowicz, 1999).

By articulating the methodology in this narrative way, the study demonstrates how selection, close reading, and

interpretation of literary details—guided by the poetics of experience—can illuminate cultural identity, memory, and the tensions and possibilities of globalization in educational contexts.

3. Results

The textual analysis of *Chronicle in Stone* reveals a layered idiographic structure that shapes the novel's representation of cultural identity. The material landscape of the city—its stone walls, minarets, fountains, narrow alleys, and layered architecture—functions as a dense semiotic network through which history and memory are sedimented. These elements construct a recognizable cultural topography, enabling readers to perceive identity not as an abstract category but as a lived, spatialized experience.

The subjective perspective of the child narrator offers another layer of idiographic density. Through episodes such as the appearance of foreign soldiers, the change of flags, the sound of planes overhead, and the oscillation between fear and fascination, identity emerges as a dynamic field of experience rather than a fixed essence.

Equally important is the role of language: local words (*qyngji*, *mazgallë*, *sternë*, among others) operate as cultural markers, evoking embodied knowledge and transmitting collective memory. This idiographic use of language grounds the text in a specific cultural environment while remaining open to external influences.

Finally, the narrative structure itself—moving between personal memory, collective history, and mythicized fragments of everyday life—creates a dialogical space in which different temporalities and cultural layers intersect. This structure does not prescribe a single reading of identity but stages it as a process in continuous negotiation with historical change.

Taken together, these elements offer a complex and multi-dimensional image of identity, one that is historically grounded, linguistically situated, and experientially lived. These results provide the analytical foundation for the subsequent discussion of identity in relation to globalizing forces.

4. Discussion

Ismail Kadare's *Chronicle in Stone* is a novel rich in autobiographical and ethnographic layers. The child-narrator's first-person voice transforms everyday observations into objects of anthropological reflection:

> *"I was wondering how it came about that people thought of piling up so many stones and pieces of wood, of making from them all sorts of walls and roofs, and then giving this huge heap of streets, shelters, chimneys, and courtyards the name city…" (Kadare, 1978, p. 3).*

The city of Gjirokastër is not simply a physical setting but a cultural organism: its stone walls, cisterns, fountains, minarets, narrow passages, loopholes (*mazgalla*), and traditional roof tiles form a network of ethnographic signs. These idiographic details encode a local worldview, mediating between material heritage and collective memory.

Even the recurrence of the word *stone* functions as a semiotic node through which the novel reveals the tension between permanence and change—a key theme in discussions of cultural identity under global pressures.

Belonging, as a dimension of identity, emerges through the narrator's sensory and pre-cognitive experiences:

> *"But the words 'occupied city,' which the grown-ups used more and more often, were the hardest for me to understand. Our city was occupied. That meant there were foreign soldiers in it. I knew that, but what troubled me was something else. I couldn't understand how a city could be unoccupied…" (Kadare, 1978, p. 24).*
> *"Moreover, if our city had not been occupied, wouldn't the streets, the fountains, and the roofs be the same, and wouldn't the same people be there? And wouldn't I have the same father and the same mother, and wouldn't Xhexhua, Kako Pinua, Aunt Xhemua, and the same people who always come, still come to visit? (Kadare, 1978, p. 24).*

This moment, alongside the recurring images of flags, foreign troops, and changing currencies, stages identity as something constantly negotiated between self and external forces**.**

> *"The weary and gloomy city had passed several times in succession from the hands of the Italians to the hands of the Greeks, and vice versa. Under the general indifference, flags and coins were exchanged…" (Kadare, 1978, p. 113).*
> *Rather than opposing the "foreign," Kadare frames it as a presence that provokes reflection and reinterpretation. The city becomes both a space of rootedness and a site of contact—mirroring processes characteristic of globalization, where local cultures are continuously reframed through encounters with the other (Appadurai, 1996).*

Kadare's stylistic gesture of simultaneously affirming and resisting comparison is also significant:

> *"Every traveler who saw the city for the first time was seized by the urge to make a comparison. But as soon as he fell into the trap, the city cast off the comparison, because it was a city like no other…" (p. 3).*

This "casting off of comparison" foregrounds the singularity of local identity in the face of homogenizing forces, while still allowing dialogue with the global. In this way, Kadare does not frame globalization as a destructive external force but as an encounter through which identity is questioned, reframed, and consciously articulated.
The symbolic scene of the departing airplanes reinforces this point:

> *"…the airplanes were leaving the airport… as one trio departed, another took off… The clouds devoured one another… then I heard the powerful roar of the large airplane, and my heart slowed its beating. It was too late now. Nothing could be fixed anymore. It rose heavily, turned its wings toward the north, and left. It left forever… The world suddenly went deaf… "What happened, my son?" asked my grandmother. "Are you crying over the airport?" my father asked harshly.*
> *…*
> *Only my grandmother moved somewhere behind me, murmuring continuously: "Oh God, what times have come back! Babies are crying for airplanes! Oh God, what ominous signs!" (Kadare, 1978, pp. 111–112)*

Here, modernity—embodied in the airplane—is perceived not as neutral progress but as a movement that dislocates and redefines belonging. Similarly, when the narrator observes the strange architecture— "You could walk down the street and, if you wished, stretch out your arm and place your hat on the top of a minaret" (p. 4)—the city becomes a space of layered cultural memory**,** suspended between the tangible past and the imagined future. This aligns with perspectives on cultural memory as a living, dynamic resource that both preserves and transforms identity under external pressures (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995).

The city's material and symbolic structures thus provide fertile ground for conceptualizing identity as a dialogical process**.** Cultural identity here is neither a fixed essence nor an eroded relic; it is a living, interpretive practice**,** capable of responding to external influences without losing its depth. Such dynamics align closely with theoretical views of globalization as a field of negotiation and re-signification rather than one of cultural erasure (Appadurai, 1996).

Kadare's work offers abundant textual detail that can be pedagogically mobilized to foster critical reflection among students: How do individuals experience belonging in a world shaped by global flows? How can identity remain rooted yet open? These are not abstract questions but are embedded in the novel's texture itself—in its sounds, materials, landscapes, and silences.

Viewing literature as a conceptual and dialogical space between cultural identity and globalization—evident also in *Broken April*, *Who Brought Doruntina*, and *The Three-Arched Bridge*—broadens the interpretive horizon and enables critical engagement with the ways local narratives articulate themselves within global modernity.

In this sense, Kadare's novel functions not merely as a literary testimony of a cultural landscape but as a conceptual terrain for understanding how processes of globalization interact with the construction and preservation of cultural identity**,** thereby responding to the guiding research question of this study.

The interpretative findings outlined above invite a broader pedagogical reflection on how literature can mediate between cultural identity and the dynamics of globalisation. If *Chronicle in Stone* demonstrates that identity is neither static nor self-contained but dialogically shaped through memory, language, and historical contingency, then its educational value lies precisely in this complexity. Within the school setting, the novel may serve as a reflective space in which students encounter the tensions between rootedness and openness, tradition and transformation. Thus, before concluding, it is necessary to consider how such insights can be translated into pedagogical practice—how literature can function not only as a text to be interpreted but as an experience through which learners conceptualise and negotiate their own positions within an interconnected world.

5. Pedagogical Implications and Cultural Reflection in the Classroom

Integrating literature such as *Chronicle in Stone* into the school curriculum not only acquaints pupils with their national literary heritage but also transforms the classroom into a site of intercultural reflection. Within the framework of globalisation, the school may be regarded as a microcosm of cultural negotiation, where texts mediate between memory and modernity. Reading Kadare in this context invites students to explore the intersections between personal and collective narratives, producing a form of learning that is both aesthetic and ethical.

From a pedagogical perspective, this approach aligns with the principles of dialogic education (Bakhtin, 1981;

Freire, 1994), which emphasise dialogue, critical thought, and reflexivity. When pupils interpret the shifting symbols of occupation and belonging in Kadare's novel, they are not merely analysing a literary text but also engaging with the categories of identity, difference, and transformation. The idiographic details—local dialects, architectural imagery, and gestures of everyday life—become instruments through which learners reconstruct the meanings of cultural belonging. Such reading practices strengthen cultural literacy, understood here as the ability to interpret cultural signs and to situate them within global flows (Ricoeur, 1991).

Moreover, reading literature anthropologically enables students to perceive globalisation not as an abstraction but as a lived experience. Classroom discussion of passages depicting the changing flags or the presence of foreign soldiers may lead to reflections on the fluidity of identity in contemporary transnational contexts. Students come to understand that cultural identity is not inherited but continually produced through interpretation and dialogue—an insight that cultivates empathy and intellectual openness.

This pedagogical orientation resonates with the idea of *cosmopolitan education* (Nussbaum, 1997; Appiah, 2006), which envisions schools as places where learners conceive of themselves as citizens of both local and global communities. Through Kadare's narrative, students undertake an ethical exercise of recognition: acknowledging the particularity of their own culture whilst appreciating its permeability to others. The novel thus becomes both mirror and bridge—a space in which identity is simultaneously affirmed and re-imagined.

Kadare's imagery itself offers a profound metaphor for this dialogical formation. The city he describes is "the only place in the world where a person, if he fell by the side of the road, instead of falling into a ditch, could fall onto the roof of some tall house" (Kadare, 1978, p. 3)—a vision of a world turned upward, where gravity yields to imagination. Likewise, cultural education invites students to "fall upward": to rise through encounter, to transform descent into elevation, and to perceive instability as creative potential. In another striking passage, "The river, swollen beyond measure from this engulfing, tried to smash the jade into its stomach. But the jade was strong… waiting for [the waters] to withdraw" (Kadare, 1978, p. 10). This image of endurance amid turbulence mirrors the resilience of cultural identity within globalisation—resisting dissolution whilst remaining open to renewal.

These literary metaphors illuminate how Kadare's writing can inform educational practice. The relationship between cultural identity and globalization, as stimulated by literature, cannot be ignored within the educational context; rather, it should be approached as a reflective space where students can perceive globalization as both a natural and metaphysical phenomenon, not merely as a cultural trend. For example, in the classroom discussion mentioned above—*The Albanian World in Kadare's Work*—the use of these excerpts from Kadare's writings may foster meaningful conversations about identity and the perception of globalization. Questions such as "How do you perceive the relationship between the national–cultural and the global?" or "How do you interpret the fact that Kadare himself speaks of the interpretation of his own work not as an expression of nationalism, but as a *bitter mockery of nationalism?"* (Kadare, 1996, p. 87) create an environment that encourages healthy and critical education, preparing students to become free, authentic, respectful individuals, capable of engaging in intercultural dialogue.

In practical terms, this interpretive framework can be translated into classroom methodology. Educators may employ interdisciplinary strategies—combining literary analysis with visual arts, oral history, or geography—to deepen pupils' understanding of how places and identities are narratively constructed. The city of Gjirokastër, for instance, may be mapped through creative projects that link textual description with cultural geography. Such activities foster experiential learning, allowing students to translate textual knowledge into cultural awareness.

Ultimately, literature in school performs a dual task: it preserves the memory of the local whilst cultivating a sensibility attuned to the global. By encouraging students to read, question, and reinterpret, teachers transform literature into a dynamic laboratory of meaning, where cultural identity and globalisation are not opposing forces but intertwined dimensions of human experience. This educational vision underscores the enduring relevance of the humanities in shaping reflective, empathetic, and globally literate individuals.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study offer a clear contribution to the guiding research question concerning how idiographic elements in Kadare's *Chronicle in Stone* can support critical reflection on cultural identity in the context of globalizing dynamics.

The idiographic density of the novel foregrounds identity as cultural memory in movement**,** constructed through material, linguistic, and narrative structures that resist reduction to fixed categories. This aligns with the idea that cultural identity is constantly negotiated, rearticulated, and open to external influences (Assmann, 1995).

Second, the analysis reveals that globalization should not be understood merely as a homogenizing threat**,** but as

a complex set of economic, cultural, and ideological processes that provoke reconfigurations of the local rather than its erasure (Robertson, 1992; Steger, 2017). Through literature, these processes can be critically examined, allowing students to situate themselves within broader global frameworks without losing sight of their own cultural coordinates.

Kadare's novel offers a pedagogical value that extends beyond literary appreciation: it becomes a site of critical reflection where students engage actively with the identity–globalization relationship. As Appadurai (1996) notes, cultural imagination plays a central role in shaping how communities negotiate global modernity. Literature such as *Chronicle in Stone* provides precisely this imaginative and critical space.

Finally, by integrating Kadare into the school curriculum, educators do not simply transmit a national literary heritage; they foster an open cultural consciousness, in which difference is not perceived as a barrier but as a resource for shared belonging. This aligns with Bhabha's (1994) notion of the "third space," where identity is articulated through encounter, translation, and negotiation.

Through this lens, literature becomes a pedagogical bridge—connecting past and present, local and global, individual memory and collective history. This constitutes its essential contribution to education in a globalized world, where the role of teaching is not merely to transmit knowledge but to cultivate interpretive awareness and ethical imagination.

Building on this view, we believe that the present study offers insights into perceiving literature in its full complexity—grounded in the principle that Kadare himself defines as "the mystery as the protective mist of literature." The central idea lies in observing and interpreting deeply symbolic details as a means of avoiding the risk of dogmatic reductionism, while simultaneously expanding and deepening students' perceptive and imaginative worlds. Future research could extend this interpretive analysis with empirical data from classroom practices and teacher reflections, further validating literature's pedagogical potential in negotiating cultural identity.

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